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Notice of Reports Received following Publication of Agenda.

Economy and Development Select Committee

Monday, 16th November, 2015 at 2.00 pm,
Council Chamber, County Hall, The Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA

Attached are reports that the committee will consider as part of the original agenda but were submitted to democratic services following publication of the agenda.

Item No	Item	Pages
3.1	Scrutiny of the performance of the function via the Annual Performance Report (due for submission to Welsh Government on 20th November)	1 - 56

Paul Matthews
Chief Executive

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Monmouthshire Local Planning Authority (LPA)

PLANNING ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (APR) – 2015

1.0 PREFACE

- 1.1 *I am delighted to introduce the first Annual Performance Report for Monmouthshire County Council's planning service. Good planning is central to the Council's objective of building sustainable, resilient communities while also generating growth in the economy and protecting the heritage and landscapes that make our County the beautiful place it is.*
- 1.2 *This report shows that Monmouthshire's planning service is performing well, and consistently above the Welsh average for performance indicators and, more importantly, in terms of customer service feedback. The planning service remains committed to an outcome-focused approach.*
- 1.3 *With the Planning (Wales) Bill achieving Royal assent in the summer of 2015, this is a landmark year for Planning in Wales and this Council is embracing the move towards to 'positive planning' that the new legislation strives to achieve.*

Councillor Peter Fox, Leader of Monmouthshire County Council

2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 This section sets out the planning context within which the Local Planning Authority operates, both corporately and in terms of Monmouthshire as a county, for the 2014-15 period.

Corporate Context

2.2 The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014 and has recently submitted its first Annual Monitoring Report (October 2015) for the 2014-15 period.

2.3 The planning service's purpose links directly to Monmouthshire County Council's objective of building sustainable, resilient communities. The Council has identified four key priorities:

- 1) Education;
- 2) Protecting the most vulnerable in society;
- 3) Promotion of enterprise, economic development and job creation;
- 4) Maintaining locally accessible services.

2.4 The following Service Improvement Plan outcomes are directly relevant to the planning service:

- Older people are able to live their good life;
- People have access to appropriate and affordable housing;
- People have good access and mobility;
- People feel safe;
- Business and enterprise; and
- People protect and enhance the environment.

2.5 The planning service is divided into two main areas: Development Control, which includes planning applications, enforcement and built conservation, and Development Plans, which deals with planning policy matters. For this reporting period, the Development Plans section reported to the Head of Planning and sat within the Enterprise directorate, while the Development Control section reported to the Head of Regulatory Services and sat within the Democracy and Regulatory Services directorate. However, professional planning guidance was provided by the Head of Planning. It is worth noting that the service has since been restructured, rebranded and co-located under a new Head of Service. This will be detailed in the 2016 APR.

2.6 Development Control:

2.6.1 The Democracy and Regulatory Services directorate vision is to provide services that are visible, sustainable, resilient, and responsive to the needs of Monmouthshire Communities and the Council that serves them.

2.6.2 The Development Control service vision is: *"To advise on, give permission for and ensure the best possible development"*. The purpose of the service is to implement the Council's statutory adopted Local Development Plan by enabling good quality development in the right locations, and resisting poor quality development, or development in the wrong locations.

2.6.3 The main customer is the applicant, however there are numerous stakeholders including individuals, communities, businesses, third sector organisations, other Council Services and elected Members.

2.7 Development Plans:

2.7.1 The Enterprise directorate vision provides a strategic context for the development and promotion of an enterprising culture, which builds business resilience and creates excellent outcomes for our communities.

2.7.2 The Development Plans service vision is: *“To ensure Planning Policy is at the heart of Sustainable Development in Monmouthshire”*. From this overarching vision, the distinct purpose of the Development Plans service is: *“The mediation of space for the co-creation of sustainable, resilient and distinct places”*. The purpose of the Planning Policy Service is to establish and disseminate the statutory land use policy framework for corporate decision making and delivery of the Single Integrated Plan. This ensures that the land use and sustainable development objectives of the Council are met with regard to adequate supply of land in sustainable locations for housing, retail, recreation, education, transport, business, waste and other needs, whilst protecting the county’s valued environmental and cultural assets.

2.7.3 The main customers are individuals, communities, businesses, third sector organisations, other Council Services and elected Members.

2.8 Key areas of work for the Service include:

- Providing pre-application advice to customers;
- Determining planning applications in accordance with adopted policy and material planning considerations, taking into account stakeholder comments and corporate objectives;
- Securing financial contributions from developers to offset the infrastructure demands of new development and meet the need for affordable housing;
- Safeguarding the County’s 2400 Listed Buildings and 31 Conservation Areas, areas of archaeological sensitivity, the Wye Valley AONB, the Brecon Beacons National Park and the European designated Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation;
- Taking robust enforcement action against unauthorised development that is unacceptable;
- Raising awareness of the statutory role and importance of the land use planning framework, building on the high levels of engagement underpinning the LDP process;
- Preparing supplementary planning guidance (SPG) to help to foster the implementation and interpretation of LDP policy;
- Implementing the Council’s LDP through engaging and working with communities, and partnership working with internal and external partners to foster the co-creation and growth of enterprise, community and environmental well-being. This will include involvement with the Whole Place work;
- Monitoring and evaluating Plan policies and the process of Plan preparation.

Local Context

2.9 Located in South East Wales, Monmouthshire occupies a strategic position between the major centres in South Wales, the South West of England and the Midlands. The County shares a border with the neighbouring local planning authorities of Newport, Torfaen and Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) in Wales and Gloucestershire, the Forest of Dean and Herefordshire in England, with Severn crossing links to South Gloucestershire. The County forms the gateway to South Wales, and is part of the Cardiff City Region. This location gives the County a distinctive identity.

2.10 Our people

2.10.1 Monmouthshire covers an area of approximately 88,000 hectares with a population of 91,323 in 2011, 7.9% of which resided within the BBNP area of the County. The County has a low population density of 1.1 persons per hectare – significantly lower than the South East Wales average of 5.3 persons per hectare – reflecting the area’s rural nature. Only 53% of the population lives in wards defined as being in urban areas (i.e. with a population of more than 10,000).

2.10.2 Our population has been increasing steadily, up 7.6% between 2001 and 2011 compared with the Welsh average of 5.5%. This increase is wholly attributable to inward migration, with natural change showing negative growth. The County has a relatively high proportion of older age groups and a lower proportion of younger adults compared with the UK and Welsh averages. This has implications for economic activity and demand for services to enable our citizens to continue to live independent lives.

2.11 Housing and quality of life

2.11.1 The County has three broad categories of settlement:

- The historic market towns of Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth have developed over many years to have a wide range of opportunities for employment, shopping, community facilities and public transport;
- The newer settlements in Severnside of Caldicot/Portskewett, Magor/Undy, Rogiet and Sudbrook where recent high levels of residential growth have taken place without the local jobs and community facilities to match. The area benefits, however, from a strategic location at the ‘Gateway’ to Wales with good access to the employment markets of Newport, Cardiff and Bristol;
- The rural area, containing the small town of Usk, the larger villages of Raglan and Penperlleni, and a large number of small villages, widely dispersed around the County.

2.11.2 In recent years annual housing completions in the Monmouthshire LPA area have averaged 310 per annum (2001-2013), although there have been significant annual variations ranging from 522 completions in 2001 to 158 in 2009/10.

2.11.3 Average house prices are significantly higher than the Welsh average (£248,500 compared to £161,400 average in 2013) resulting in a significant need for affordable housing (source: Hometrack data). Of the 3,719 dwellings completed between 2001 and 2013, 15.8% were classed as affordable.

2.11.4 Monmouthshire is generally a prosperous County offering a high quality of life for its residents. This is reflected in the 2011 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation with none of the lower super output areas (LSOA) in Monmouthshire in the most deprived 10% in Wales. However, poor access to community facilities and declining local service provision is an issue for rural communities. The health of Monmouthshire's population is generally better than the Welsh average, with greater life expectancies and higher proportion of residents classing themselves as being in good health (2011 Census). Fewer residents in the County suffer with a limiting long term illness compared with Wales as a whole. The rate of reported crime in Monmouthshire tends to be lower than for Wales as a whole.

2.12 Our economy

2.12.1 The County has a high proportion of working age people in employment (62.8% in 2011) compared to neighbouring Authorities or the Welsh average (58.2%). Our economy is reliant on the public sector and services for employment:

- The public administration, education and health sector accounts for 33.3% of jobs;
- The distribution, retail, hotels and restaurants sector accounts for 27.4% of jobs;
- Tourism, as part of the services sector, is also important in the County accounting for 12.1% of jobs, higher than the Welsh average (9.6%). There were over two million visitors to the County in 2012, with tourist expenditure amounting to nearly £158m thereby supporting 2,700 jobs.

(Business Register & Employment Survey 2012).

2.12.2 The County had 3,720 active enterprises in 2011, 27% of which were in the property and business services sector. Nearly 99% of the County's businesses are classified as small (i.e. up to 49 employees). Monmouthshire has experienced growth in eight of fourteen sectors in the decade to 2011, with the greatest increases in the property business services, hotels and catering and education and health sectors, while there has been a decline in the number of manufacturing businesses.

2.12.3 Overall, Monmouthshire had a net outflow of 400 commuters – with 17,900 commuting out of the Authority to work and 17,500 commuting in. There is significant in-commuting from Newport (2,400), Torfaen (2,500), Blaenau Gwent (2,200), other Welsh authorities (4,500) and from outside of Wales (5,900). In addition, a relatively high proportion of Monmouthshire's residents travel long distances to work, with a high usage of the private car. Heavy reliance on the private car and limited opportunities for public transport is a particular issue in rural areas.

2.13 Communications

2.13.1 The County is easily accessible from the rest of Wales by the M4, A40, A449 and A4042 and from England by the M4 and M48 Severn Bridges and the A48, A40 and A465. The good road transport links connect the County to major population centres such as Cardiff, Newport and Bristol. Monmouthshire is served by a number of both local and national bus routes, with main bus stations in the towns of Abergavenny, Chepstow and Monmouth. In terms of rail provision, Monmouthshire has four stations, at Caldicot, Chepstow and Severn Tunnel Junction in the south of the County and Abergavenny in the north.

2.13.2 Public rights of way include 1,499km of footpaths, 71km of bridleways, 84.5km of restricted byways and 1.5km of unrestricted byways. These public rights of way are complemented by permissive paths. The County has three long distance regional trails (Usk Valley, Wye Valley and Three Castles walks) as well as the national trail (Offa's Dyke Path). The County also provides the start of the all-Wales coastal path. In addition, there are two national cycle routes within Monmouthshire, both of which run from Chepstow. The countryside access opportunities available in the County are one of its key assets, sustaining tourism and providing opportunities for economic regeneration.

2.14 Our natural heritage

2.14.1 The County is noted for its rural beauty and has a rich and diverse landscape stretching from the coastline of the Gwent Levels in the South of the County, to the uplands of the Brecon Beacons National Park in the north, the picturesque river corridor of the Wye Valley AONB in the east, and the Blaenavon Industrial World Heritage Site to the north-west. The landscape and countryside of Monmouthshire contributes not only to the health and well-being of Monmouthshire's residents but also supports the important tourist economy.

2.14.2 Monmouthshire has major biodiversity and nature conservation resources, a number of which are internationally or nationally recognised, including:

- The Severn Estuary Special Area for Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ramsar Site (Wetland of international importance);
- The River Wye, River Usk, Wye Valley woodlands and Wye Valley Special Areas of Conservation (bat sites);
- 49 nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – covering some 2,087 hectares. Most are woodland or grassland sites with others designated for their wetland or geological interest;
- Two National Nature Reserves (Fiddler's Elbow (woodland) and Lady Park Wood) and one Local Nature Reserve at Cleddon Bog;
- Approximately 650 non-statutory Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) predominantly in relation to grassland and ancient and semi-natural woodland areas.

The statutory sites cover 6,432 hectares, or 7.6% of the LPA area; 3,664 hectares of which comprises the Severn Estuary SPA.

2.14.3 Other key challenges facing the planning service include areas at risk of flooding (including most of the Gwent Levels and the flood plains of the Rivers Usk and Wye and their tributaries. There are however, flood defences within the towns of Chepstow, Monmouth and Usk.

2.15 Our built heritage

2.15.1 The Monmouthshire LPA area has a rich built heritage and historic environment which includes:

- Approximately 2,400 Listed Buildings, of which 2% are Grade I, 10% are Grade II* and 88% are Grade II. Of note, around 176 Listed Buildings have been identified as being at risk.

- 31 Conservation Areas – designated for their special historic or architectural interest, covering some 1,648 hectares in total;
- 44 Historic Parks and Gardens – identified as having a Special Historic Interest, covering 1,910 hectares;
- 3 Landscapes of Outstanding Historic Interest identified by Cadw (parts of Blaenavon, the Gwent Levels and the Lower Wye Valley);
- Approximately 169 Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

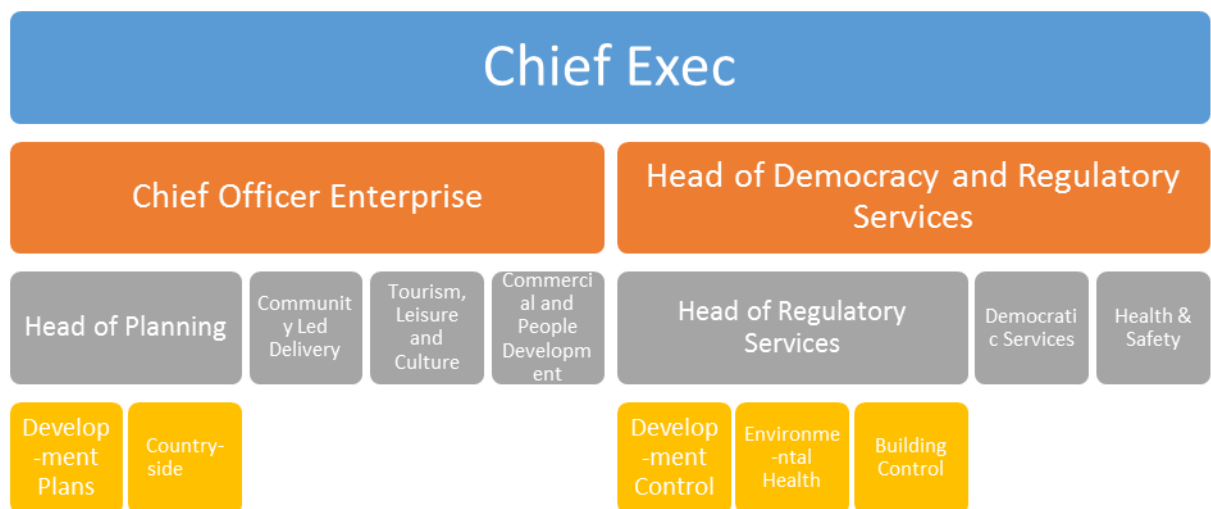
2.15.2 The LDP is heavily reliant on greenfield sites to deliver its development needs due to an overall shortage of brownfield sites. Air quality in Monmouthshire generally meets current standards, although there are two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) within the County, where objective levels of nitrogen dioxide may be exceeded. These are at Bridge Street in Usk and Hardwick Hill/Mount Pleasant in Chepstow. The Monmouthshire Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy has not identified any sites as being contaminated.

3.0 PLANNING SERVICE

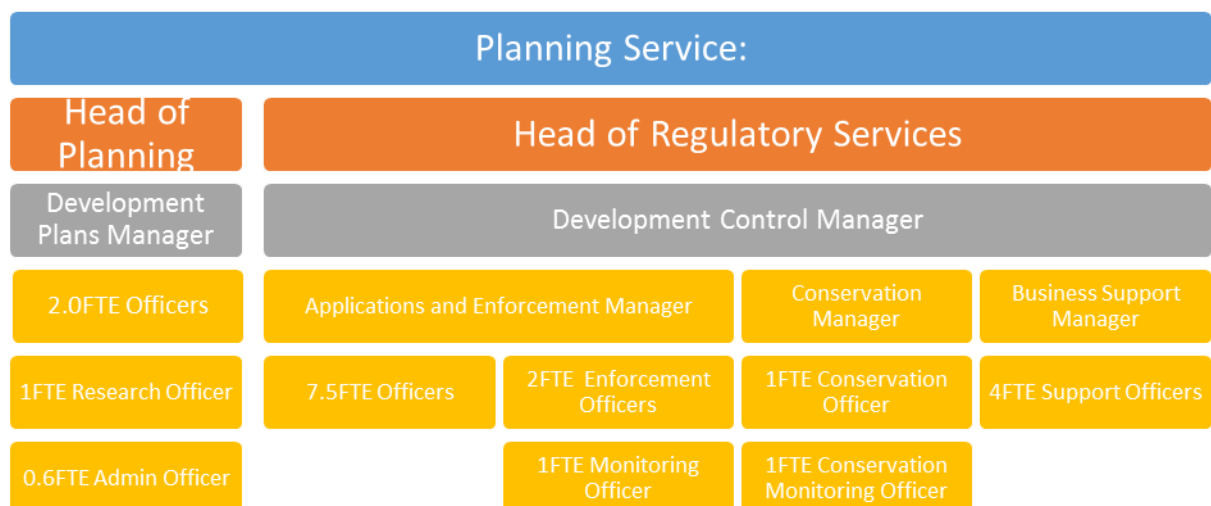
Organisational setting

- 3.1 For this reporting period, the Development Plans section reported to the Head of Planning and sat within the Enterprise directorate, while the Development Control section reported to the Head of Regulatory Services and sat within the Democracy and Regulatory Services directorate. However, professional planning guidance was provided by the Head of Planning. For the reporting period, the Development Plans team was located in the Council’s Magor offices, while the Development Control team was based in the Council’s Usk offices.
- 3.2 It is worth noting that the service has since been restructured, rebranded and co-located in the Usk offices under a new Head of Planning. This will be detailed in the 2016 APR.

Department structure and reporting lines for the 2014-15 reporting period



Planning service staffing structure for the 2014-15 reporting period



Links with other Council projects

- 3.3 There are a number of wider corporate activities that impact upon the planning service, or that the planning service supports and/or shapes:
- 3.3.1 **Budget management**
Local Government budgets have been heavily cut over recent years, and the planning service has had to make savings in the same way as all other unprotected services. This has comprised a combination of reduced expenditure, increased income budget lines, and reduced staffing costs.
- 3.3.2 **Service improvement/Systems Thinking**
The Council has reviewed a number of its services via a Systems Thinking approach. Planning underwent this review between 2010 and 2012, and it is now fully embedded. The review seeks to strip the service back to basic principles: who is the customer, and what is important to them? As far as is possible (for example taking into account legislative requirements), activities that do not add value to the customer are removed. In terms of the planning service, this has resulted in a high performing, outcome-focussed service. Officers are empowered to make decisions and take responsibility for their caseload from start to end. The outcome focus means that our emphasis is on securing a positive outcome where possible, rather than a focus on arbitrary performance targets. Performance is still monitored against targets, however this is in the context that the things they measure such as decision speed are only a small part of the wider picture, and are things that are not always important to our customers.
- 3.3.3 **Asset Management**
In response to budget pressures, in addition to a wider desire to use our assets responsibly, the Council is undergoing a process of reviewing its estates portfolio and where appropriate, disposing of those assets. The planning service plays a key role in enabling best use of/return from those assets. As an example, towards the end of this reporting period, the Council submitted a planning application for a solar farm on one of its own County farms. The revenue from energy generation can be reinvested into providing valuable services to our citizens.
- 3.3.4 **21st Century schools**
The planning service continues to play a key role in advising on and enabling the delivery of replacement school buildings as part of the 21st Century schools project. The aim of this project is to give our young people the best possible start in life, and give them the best possible range of opportunities by the time they leave school.
- 3.3.5 **Whole Place**
We have embarked on a programme of community-led place planning, with two Whole Place Plans completed to date. There are opportunities for greater involvement from the planning service in this area of work, with potential links to CIL/community infrastructure priorities and Community/Place Plans.

3.3.6 Local Transport Plan

We have contributed towards the Council's Local Transport Plan, and will continue to work with colleagues to help enable delivery of the identified priorities, whether this be via LDP allocations, planning application decisions or securing planning contributions.

3.3.7 IT improvements and 'channel shift'

The Council has a shared IT resource with Torfaen and Blaenau Gwent Councils, and through this is working towards implementation of a new planning back-office system. It is intended that this will be a shared system with Torfaen Council.

In addition, the planning service is a key frontline service in terms of visibility and customer access. We have already introduced agile working and electronic document management, and work is on-going to improve our website to improve the ability of customers and stakeholders to self-serve where possible.

The Council is working on a number of initiatives to improve broadband access in rural 'not-spots'. Further information will be provided in the 2016 APR.

3.3.7 Development Team approach

A fee-paying pre-application advice service was introduced in late 2013 which has been well received by customers and is now embedded. The service continues to be reviewed in response to customer feedback. This service includes offering a Development Team approach, which seeks to provide an integrated, round-table multi-disciplinary approach to pre-application enquiries. This has helped build positive relationships with other service areas, and help all parties to understand each other's objectives and priorities, leading to better outcomes.

3.3.8 Best practice benchmarking

We are involved in various regional and all-Wales working groups, including:

- Planning Officers' Society for Wales (POSW) (meeting of all Chief Planning Officers from Welsh LPAs);
- South East Wales Strategic Planning Group (SEWSPG) (meeting of planning policy lead officers from the ten SE Wales LPAs and the Brecon Beacons National Park)
- South East Wales Heritage Forum
- South East Wales Development Management Group (meeting of the SE Wales Development Management lead officers)

3.3.9 In addition to the above, we hold monthly liaison meetings between the Development Plans and Development Control teams to aid interpretation and implementation of the recently adopted Local Development Plan. This has provided a valuable forum to ensure a cohesive planning service is provided.

Operating budget

3.4 The operating budget for the service is shown below together with the changes from last year:

	Costs	Income	Net Cost	Change
2013-14	£1,671,500	£580,000	£1,091,500	
2014-15	£1,535,100	£593,000	£942,100	-£149,400 (-14%)
2015-16*	£1,544,000	£632,700	£911,300	-£30,800 (-3%)

*Budgeted figures are shown for 2015-16, actual figures are shown for the other years

3.5 The two main costs for the service are staff costs and the LDP budget (money is transferred from the above budget to sit in an LDP reserve, built up to fund the next LDP). Income is generated by planning application fees and pre-application advice (the latter amounts to approximately £35,000 per annum).

3.6 For 2015/16, planning application fee income is estimated to rise, given the life cycle of the Local Development Plan, with significant application income anticipated from the larger housing sites likely to come forward over this period, allied to applications for employment purposes and renewable energy development proposals. In addition, it is now known that planning application fees have been increased by 15% from 01 October 2015.

3.7 A temporary Development Control Officer post has been funded using the increased income (in post since January 2015) and a fixed term Landscape Officer post has been created for 2015-16.

3.8 Research by the Welsh Government identifies that application fees recover approximately 60% of the cost of dealing with planning applications. Additional costs are incurred through the work involved in the statutory Development Plan, and via other services such as enforcement and conservation. Increased planning application fee income is not ring-fenced to the planning department as such, however budgeted increases in income are mostly used to reduce the net cost of the service to the Council. In-year windfall extra income is used to balance the Council's budgets and offset overspend in other services. Conversely in previous years, underspend in other services was used to offset planning's under-recovery of income, when the economic downturn resulted in a sudden drop in fee income.

3.9 Application fee income has fluctuated significantly over recent years, and this poses a challenge for budget management going forward. Fee income is heavily influenced by the wider economy, for example house-building (which itself is affected by mortgage lending and development viability) and other funding streams (for example the feed-in tariff for renewable energy schemes).

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Budgeted income	£374k	£462k	£473k	£490k	£525k	£633k
Actual income	£459k	£375k	£415k	£596k	£584k	

Staff resources

- 3.10 Staffing levels for the reporting period are shown in the chart at paragraph 3.2 above. Staffing levels in the planning service have reduced by 5.2FTE between 2013 and the end of this reporting period, although an additional fixed term post for 1.0FTE was created in 2015 to help the service stay on top of an increasing workload.
- 3.11 Several colleagues were on maternity leave during the reporting period, and we appointed Prospero Planning to assist with the caseload until the end of 2015. This arrangement has worked well.
- 3.12 For the reporting period, sickness levels were very low, with an average of 3.24 days per colleague lost due to sickness.
- 3.13 Training and development opportunities provided for colleagues during the reporting period include management coaching and Green Infrastructure (the combined approach to landscape, biodiversity and ecology). This is in addition to in-house development opportunities provided via liaison meetings. IT training opportunities on advanced Excel applications and Map Info were also completed. External training and development opportunities included attendance at events run by Participation Cymru on e-participation to inform the future use of social media; Planning Aid Wales on community planning and the Planning Advisory Improvement Service on positive planning and the way forward in Wales. Joint training was commissioned with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council on sustainability appraisal/strategic environmental assessment.
- 3.14 100% of colleagues have had an annual appraisal during the reporting period.

4.0 YOUR LOCAL STORY

Workload

4.1 Our Local Development Plan was adopted in February 2014 and our key work pressures during this reporting period surround the LDP:

- Familiarisation with the Plan, and the interpretation and implementation of its policies by customers, case officers and elected Members;
- Working on Supplementary Planning Guidance;
- Determining planning applications for the key allocated sites.

Application caseload has also increased significantly during the reporting period, however following completion of the Systems Thinking review, the proportion of applications determined within the agreed deadlines has also increased despite reduced staffing levels. This increase in decision speed has not been at the expense of the outcome, with the proportion of approvals remaining relatively constant:

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Applications received	1083	987	983	1173
Applications determined	956	874	852	1053
% within 8 weeks	45%	45%	70%	76%
% applications approved	94%	94%	93%	95%

4.2 No meaningful historical trends can be drawn in relation to the enforcement workload due to significant changes to the performance indicator definition during 2013-14 and again during 2014-15, which changed both the deadline and the definition of when a case is 'resolved'.

Annual Monitoring Report

4.3 The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014 and therefore our first LDP Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) was submitted in October 2015 to cover the 2014-15 period. Being the first AMR it is impossible to identify trends. However two key areas have been identified for close future monitoring:

- i) housing delivery and housing land supply;
- ii) take-up of employment sites.

In addition, the Council's Economy and Development Select Committee has identified the following area for scrutiny;

- iii) tourism development. This will be reported in the 2016 AMR.

4.4 For the APR and AMR period, the Council had a housing land supply of 5.2 years. As is to be expected immediately following the adoption of an LDP, there has been a time lag in key allocated sites coming forward. As such, the July 2015 agreed housing land supply calculated in accordance with the new TAN1, stands at 5.0 years. However, good progress is being made to date on the strategic sites:

SAH1 – Deri Farm, Abergavenny (250 dwellings): a planning application has been submitted, however the applicants are arguing that there are viability issues due to the need to underground the pylons crossing the site, and the land owner having unrealistic expectations of the site's value;

SAH2 – Crick Road, Portskewett (285 dwellings): pre-application community consultation has been completed, pre-application advice sought and an outline application is being prepared;

SAH3 – Fairfield Mabey, Chepstow (350 dwellings): an outline application has been submitted and significant progress made. However, it has been stalled for many months due to delays by the Welsh Government in assessing road capacity and air quality issues and removing its holding objection. This remains unresolved;

SAH4 – Wonastow Road, Monmouth (450 dwellings): outline planning permission and reserved matters approval have been given for 340 dwellings. An outline application for the remainder of the site (Drewen Farm) is expected in the near future;

SAH5 – Rockfield Farm, Undy (270 dwellings): pre-application community consultation has been completed, pre-application advice sought and an outline application is being prepared;

SAH6 – Land at Vinegar Hill, Undy (225 dwellings): pre-application advice has been sought and an outline application is being prepared;

SAH7 – Former Paper Mill site, Sudbrook (190 dwellings): an application has been received for full planning permission and an appeal lodged against non-determination. A second identical application has been submitted to allow negotiations to continue. As submitted, zero affordable housing is proposed which is contrary to policy and fails to create sustainable communities.

- 4.5 The AMR highlights issues surrounding the delivery of affordable housing, and developers continue to raise viability issues on some of the strategic housing sites above. This is a Wales-wide issue.
- 4.6 During the APR and AMR period, take-up of key employment sites has been very low. However, the Council is currently in discussions regarding a number of schemes and an application has been received for a significant proposal on the Wonastow Road employment site, which would see a key local employer retained with the County and expand. An application for another significant proposal has been submitted for the InBev brewery at Magor. Consequently, the take-up of employment land is likely to increase significantly in the 2015-16.
- 4.7 The Council's Economy and Development Select Committee has recently (October 2015) scrutinised the LDP's impact on enabling tourism-related development. As stated above, the tourism industry forms a key part of the County's economy and links directly to what makes Monmouthshire distinctive. This scrutiny identified a need to produce Supplementary Planning Guidance to clarify for customers and officers how the LDP supports different types of tourism development, and also identified a need for future revisions to the policy to allow greater flexibility for agricultural diversification for tourism purposes. This will be reported in greater detail in the 2015-16 AMR.

Service Plan priorities for 2014-15

- 4.8 The Service Plans for the Development Control and Development Plans areas identified the following priority actions:
- Sustaining a good standard of performance against performance indicators while applying systems review methods. As can be seen from this report, this priority has been achieved;

- Successfully assimilate the new 'pre-application advice service' into our workflow. This priority has been achieved and a development team approach introduced;
- Adapt to, implement and disseminate new LDP policies. This priority is on-going;
- Prepare, consult and adopt Supplementary Planning Guidance. A programme for the preparation of SPG, including prioritisation between different policy areas to reflect available resources was adopted by Planning Committee. SPG has been adopted relating to Green Infrastructure, design guidance for agricultural building conversions; replacement dwellings/extensions in the countryside;
- Work towards adopting a Community Infrastructure Levy. This is on-going, and it is anticipated that CIL will be adopted in September 2016. Consultation has been completed on the pre-draft charging schedule;
- Cross-departmental working to ensure corporate plans and activities align with the LDP. This priority is on-going;
- Consult on and adopt the draft Conservation Area Appraisals (CAAs). This priority was delayed until 2015-16 due to resource pressures;
- Implement a replacement IT data base system with planning application, enforcement and appeals modules. This priority is on-going. A system has been procured and will be tested and implemented during 2015-16.

Local pressures

4.9 Key local pressures include:

- Enabling delivery of the County's housing needs: bringing forward allocated LDP sites; site viability; achieving good planning decisions, creating sustainable communities and maintaining a five year housing land supply; CIL;
- Securing timely consultation responses from consultees, both internal and external;
- The short lifespan of the adopted LDP;
- Uncertainty regarding Local Government reorganisation;
- Constant change caused by successive new legislation, national planning policy and procedures.

5.0 WHAT SERVICE USERS THINK

What matters to our customers/citizens?

- 5.1 Between 2010 and 2012 the Council's planning service underwent a Systems Thinking review. This review sought to strip the function back to first principles: what is important to our customers, and how can waste (actions or procedures that do not add value to the outcome) be eliminated. This evidence-based review has been fully implemented, although part of the Systems Thinking approach requires services to be kept under review and closely monitored.
- 5.2 This review identified that the following things are important to customers:
- Customers value pre-application advice and advice during the consideration of the application;
 - They want officers to be accessible and there to be open and honest communication;
 - They want consistency of pre- application advice and in validation of applications
 - They want Planning Committee to follow the officer's recommendation and value being able to have a dialogue with Members prior to determination
 - They don't want too many conditions being attached to decisions, and when conditions are imposed they should be relevant and easy to discharge
 - They value being able to submit an application online and to search for applications and information online.
 - Third parties value being listened to during the application process.
- 5.3 The service therefore operates with these priorities shaping behaviour and procedures. The service is committed to having an outcome focus rather than chasing arbitrary performance targets that are not a priority to our customers.

LDP survey

- 5.4 Following adoption of our Local Development Plan in February 2014, a customer feedback survey was undertaken in November 2014 with 120 responses received. The key headlines from this survey were very positive:
- 60% total respondents were satisfied they had been kept well informed throughout the process
 - 63% total respondents found forms easy to complete (this was 83% amongst agents and external organisations)
 - 70% all respondents considered they understood the LDP process
 - 76% all respondents considered they had received adequate feedback on consultations
- 5.5 Feedback identified the following areas for improvement:
- Website: customers sometimes experienced difficulties in accessing information due to the sheer number of documents, the lack of search facility, or the website going down. The MCC website has since undergone a redesign and enhanced search facilities added. Future improvements will be made in terms of web page design and links between individual pages and documents. In addition, an increased use of social media will seek to target a wider audience.

- Length of process.
- Use of technical language, terminology and jargon.
- Dissatisfaction with outcomes, e.g. sites were allocated despite opposition.
- Confusion caused by the alternative sites stage. The Welsh Government has since amended the regulations to delete this stage.

Customer satisfaction survey

- 5.6 In 2014-15 we conducted a customer satisfaction survey aimed at assessing the views of people that had received a planning application decision during the period. The survey covered the period October 2014 – March 2015.
- 5.7 The survey was sent to 253 people, 24% of whom submitted a whole or partial response. The majority of responses (44%) were from local agents. 39% were from members of the public. 9% of respondents had their most recent planning application refused.
- 5.8 We asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the planning service. They were given the following answer options:
- Strongly agree;
 - Tend to agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree;
 - Tend to disagree; and
 - Strongly disagree.

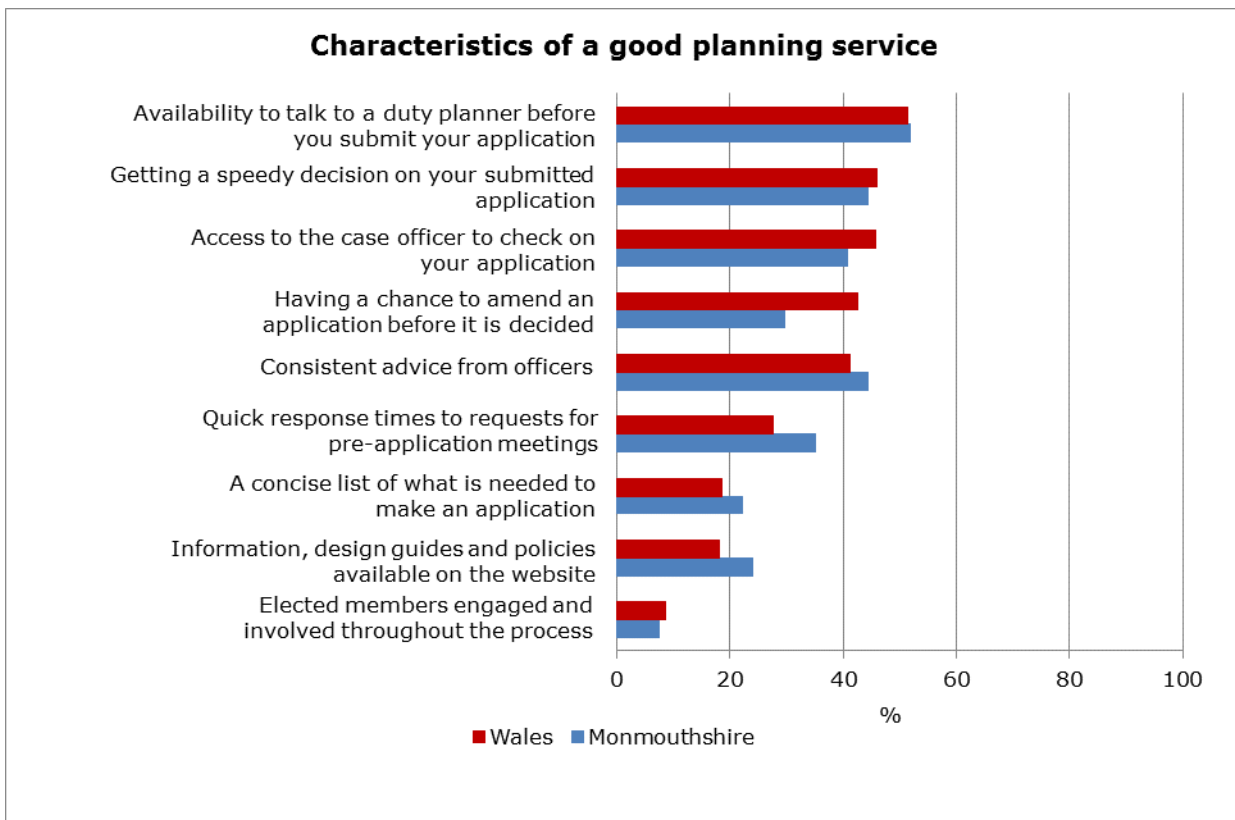
Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents that selected either ‘tend to agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ for each statement for both our planning authority and Wales.

Table 1: The percentage of respondents who agreed with each statement, 2014-15

Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Monmouthshire LPA	Wales
The LPA enforces its planning rules fairly and consistently	54	45
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	65	57
The LPA gives help throughout, including with conditions	63	48
The LPA responded promptly when they had questions	67	55
They were listened to about their application	66	56
They were kept informed about their application	69	46
They were satisfied overall with how the LPA handled their application	65	57

- 5.9 We also asked respondents to select three planning service characteristics from a list that they thought would most help them achieve successful developments. Figure 1 shows how often each characteristic was selected as a percentage of the total number of selections. For us, 'the availability to talk to a duty planner before submitting an application' was the most popular choice. This customer feedback has been taken into account when reviewing service delivery, for example when considering the level of duty planning officer service that we are able to sustain. Given the customer feedback, we have sought to maximise the level of service provided.

Figure 1: Characteristics of a good planning service, Monmouthshire LPA, 2014-15



5.10 Comments received include:

"The officer was very helpful and responsive to queries."

"I cannot speak highly enough of the people that I had to deal with during my planning application, they were helpful, informative, knowledgeable and above all sensible, especially when it came to dealing with objections."

"We found that the planning officers take far too long to decide on an application, they can change their mind at the last minute about advice they have given you and just seem to be unapproachable and unhelpful."

5.11 The nature of the customer satisfaction survey means that responses are anonymous, making it difficult to probe further into negative feedback such as the latter comment above. However, overall, it is clear that the service can be considered to be performing well. As can be seen from Table 1 above, Monmouthshire's survey results exceed the Welsh average in every category.

5.12 In addition to the above survey, the number of formal complaints and letters offering compliments are recorded, both of which show a positive trend:

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of formal complaints received*	19	19	11
Number of compliments received	2	3	4

*This indicates formal complaints received, not upheld.

6.0 OUR PERFORMANCE 2014-15

6.1 This section details our performance in 2014-15. It considers both the Planning Performance Framework indicators and other available data to help paint a comprehensive picture of performance. Where appropriate we make comparisons between our performance and the all Wales picture.

6.2 Performance is analysed across the five key aspects of planning service delivery as set out in the Planning Performance Framework:

- Plan making;
- Efficiency;
- Quality;
- Engagement; and
- Enforcement.

Plan making

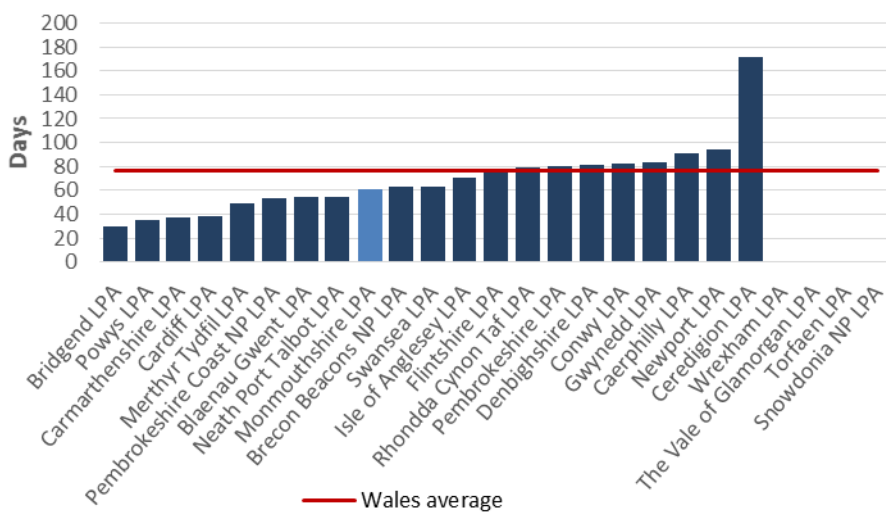
6.3 As at 31 March 2015, we were one of 21 LPAs that had a current development plan in place and one of 16 LPAs in Wales that had an adopted LDP.

6.4 During the APR period we had 5.2 years of housing land supply identified, making us one of 7 Welsh LPAs with the required 5 years’ supply.

Efficiency

6.5 In 2014-15 we determined 1,053 planning applications, each taking, on average, 62 days (9 weeks) to determine. This compares to an average of 76 days (11 weeks) across Wales. Figure 2 shows the average time taken by each LPA to determine an application during the year. As can be seen, Monmouthshire’s performance compares favourably.

Figure 2: Average time taken (days) to determine applications, 2014-15

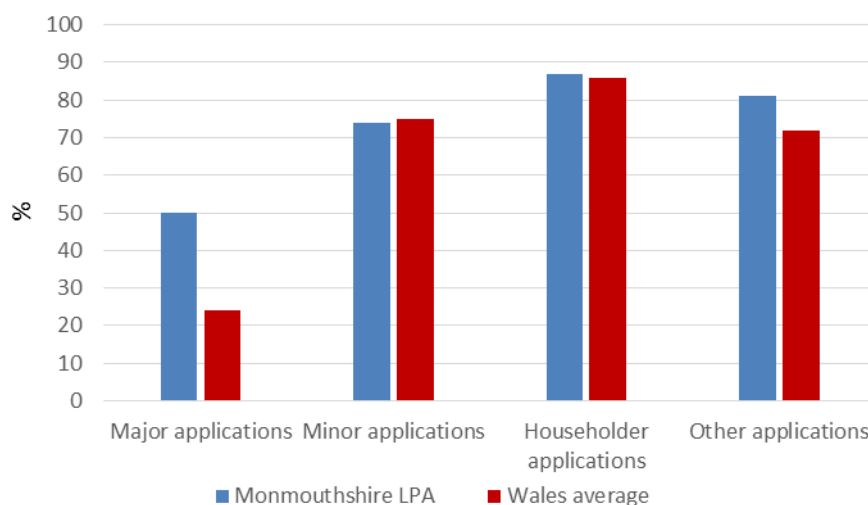


6.6 76% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This compared to 73% across Wales, but was below the 80% target. It is worth noting that only

5 out of 25 LPAs met the 80% target, which suggests that the Welsh Government’s target is unrealistic. As stated above, following engagement with customers and stakeholders, Monmouthshire County Council has made the evidence-based decision that the outcome of planning applications is far more important than the speed of decision-making. Within reason, customers would prefer to continue working with us to secure an acceptable scheme and obtain planning permission, with as few pre-commencement conditions as possible, than simply have a decision made within an arbitrary 8 week deadline. The impact of planning decisions is long-lived and, while it is recognised that timely decisions can assist the economy, developers and investors also seek clarity and certainty and ultimately want planning permission. Our focus is therefore on the outcome. Notwithstanding the above statement, our performance for the first two quarters of 2015-16 stands at 80% which in part reflects a change to the Welsh Government PI definition which allows LPAs to agree extended deadlines with customers. This approach fits the Council’s customer focus, and further evidences that customers are happy with a longer decision time, within reason, if it secures a positive outcome.

6.7 Figure 3 shows the percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales across the four main types of application for our LPA and Wales. It shows that we determined 87% of householder applications within the required timescales.

Figure 3: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales, by type, 2014-15



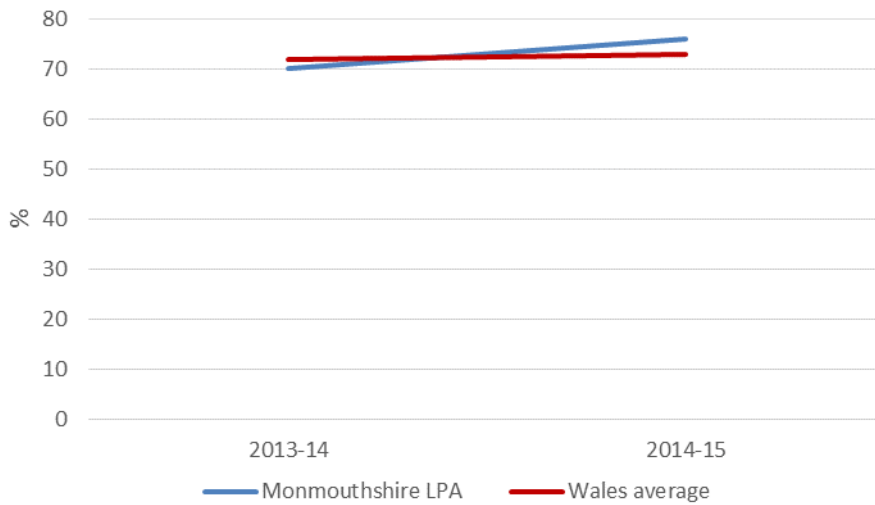
6.8 Between 2013-14 and 2014-15, as Figure 4 below shows, the percentage of planning applications we determined within the required timescales increased from 70%. Wales also saw an increase this year.

6.9 Over the same period:

- The number of applications we received increased;
- The number of applications we determined increased; and
- The number of applications we approved increased.

This shows strong and improving performance.

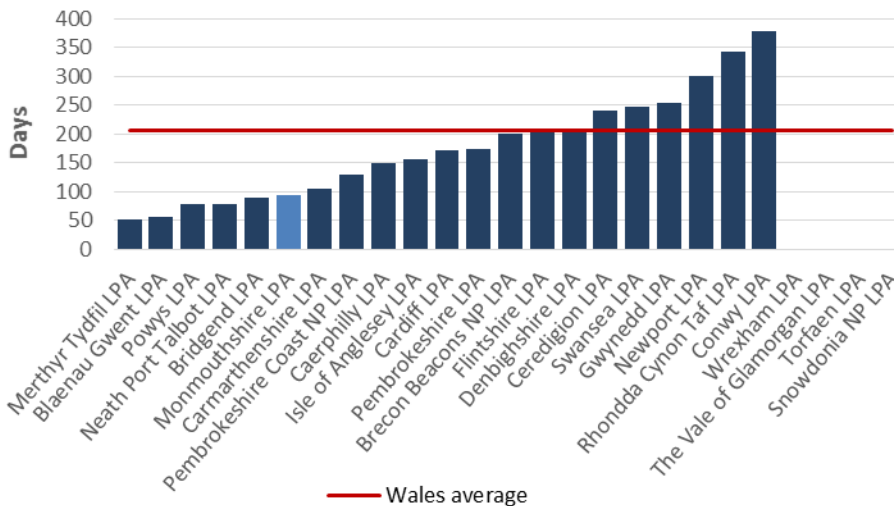
Figure 4: Percentage of planning applications determined within the required timescales



Major applications

6.10 We determined 12 major planning applications in 2014-15, none of which were subject to an EIA. Each application took, on average, 95 days (14 weeks) to determine. As Figure 5 shows, this was shorter than the Wales average of 206 days (29 weeks). In the first half of 2015-16 this average time has increased to 107 days, but that figure remains well below the 2014-15 Wales average.

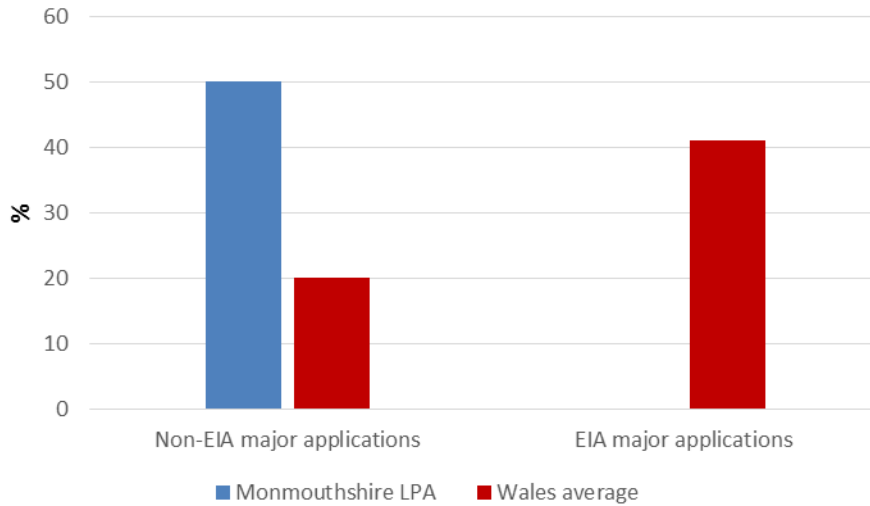
Figure 5: Average time (days) taken to determine a major application, 2014-15



6.11 50% of these major applications were determined within the required timescales, the second highest percentage of all Welsh LPAs. This strong performance has continued into 2015-16, with an impressive 63% of major applications determined within agreed timescales in the first half of the year. This performance is aided by our pre-application advice service and by our Systems Thinking-backed approach, which, with the applicant’s agreement, seeks to work towards a ‘clean’ application.

6.12 Figure 6 shows the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales by the type of major application. 50% of our 'standard' major applications i.e. those not requiring an EIA, were determined within the required timescales during the year.

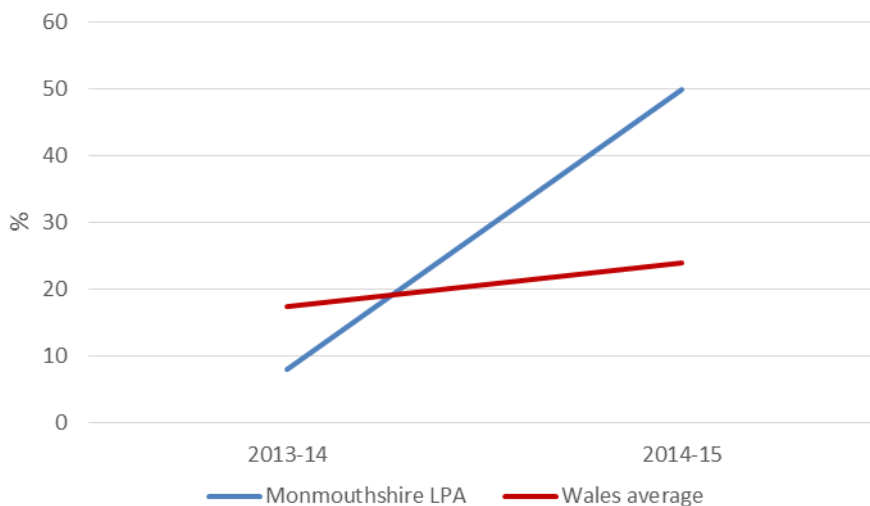
Figure 6: Percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales during the year, by type, 2014-15



6.13 Since 2013-14 the percentage of major applications determined within the required timescales had increased significantly from 8% to 50%. In contrast, the number of major applications determined decreased while the number of applications subject to an EIA determined during the year stayed the same.

6.14 Figure 7 shows the trend in the percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales in recent years and how this compares to Wales.

Figure 7: Percentage of major planning applications determined within the required timescales



6.15 Over the same period:

- The percentage of minor applications determined within the required timescales increased from 69% to 74%;
- The percentage of householder applications determined within the required timescales increased from 85% to 87%; and
- The percentage of other applications determined within the required timescales increased from 77% to 81%.

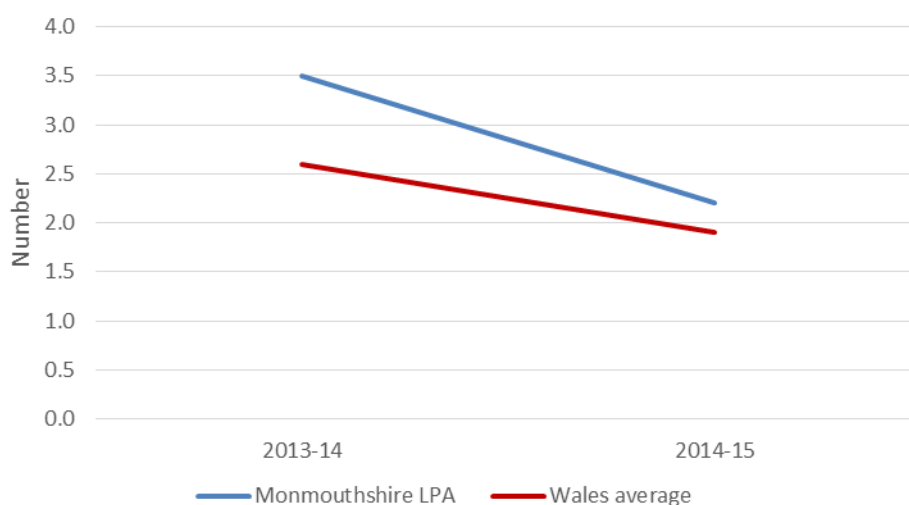
Quality

6.16 In the last two quarters of 2014-15 (October 2014 – March 2015) our Planning Committee made 32 planning application decisions, which equated to 6% of all planning applications determined. Across Wales 7% of all planning application decisions were made by planning committee over the same period. (This data was not collected across Wales for the whole year, hence only the last two quarters are referred to).

6.17 3% of these member-made decisions went against officer advice (one application). This compared to 11% of member-made decisions across Wales. This equated to 0.2% of all planning application decisions going against officer advice; 0.7% across Wales. The application in question was the proposed solar farm at Rhewl Farm, which was subsequently allowed at appeal. There have now been three appeal decisions for solar farms in Monmouthshire, along with others in adjoining Authorities, which have helped inform the Council's stance on future applications.

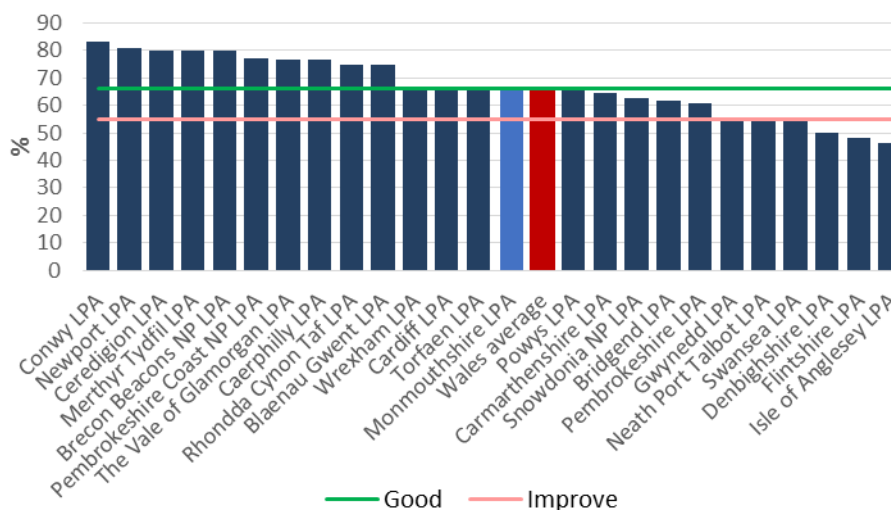
6.18 In 2014-15 we received 27 appeals against our planning decisions, which equated to 2.2 appeals for every 100 applications received. Across Wales 1.9 appeals were received for every 100 applications. Monmouthshire therefore received a slightly higher proportion of appeals compared to the Wales average. However, the proportion remains low. Figure 8 shows how the volume of appeals received has changed since 2013-14 and how this compares to Wales.

Figure 8: Number of appeals received per 100 planning applications



- 6.19 Over the same period the percentage of planning applications approved increased from 94% to 95%. This outcome focus continues to be evidenced, with 96% of applications approved within the first half of 2015-16.
- 6.20 Of the 24 appeals that were decided during the year, 67% were dismissed. As Figure 9 shows, this was higher than the percentage of appeals dismissed across Wales as a whole and we were one of 14 LPAs that reached the 66% target.

Figure 9: Percentage of appeals dismissed, 2014-15



- 6.21 During 2014-15 we had 1 application for costs at a section 78 appeal upheld, making us one of the 5 LPAs to have at least one such application upheld in the year. This costs award related to an application for a solar farm at Manor Farm, Llanvapley, which was refused by Planning Committee contrary officer advice. Costs were awarded because the Council’s case introduced a late objection relating to agricultural land quality, which did not form a reason for refusal at Committee.

Engagement

- 6.22 We are:
- one of 22 LPAs that allowed members of the public to address the Planning Committee; and
 - one of 20 LPAs that had an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access, track their progress (and view their content). However, we recognise that our website can be improved and intend to work on this over the coming year to improve the ability of our customers and citizens to track progress of applications and to ‘self serve’.
- 6.23 As Table 2 shows, 65% of respondents to our 2014-15 customer satisfaction survey agreed that the LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application.

Table 2: Feedback from our 2014-15 customer satisfaction survey

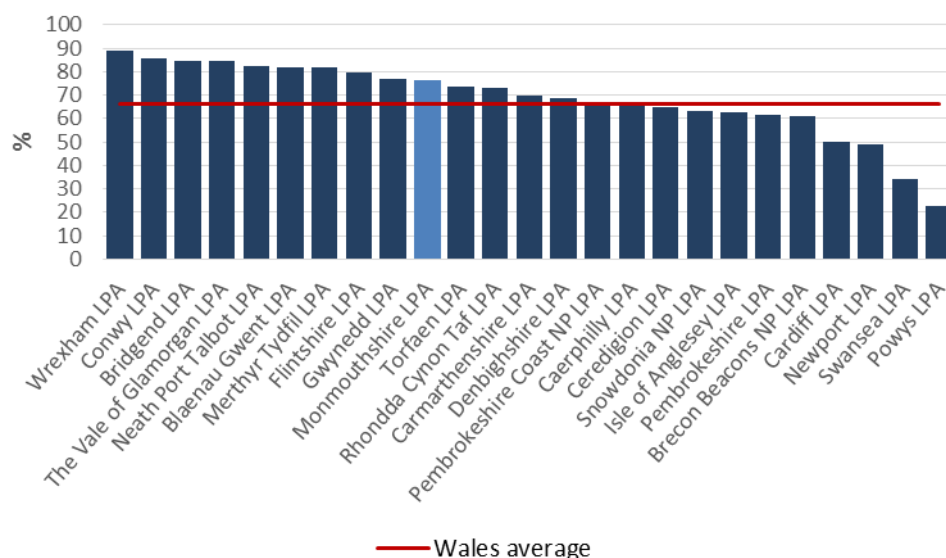
Percentage of respondents who agreed that:	%	
	Monmouthshire LPA	Wales
The LPA gave good advice to help them make a successful application	65	57
They were listened to about their application	66	56

Enforcement

6.24 In 2014-15 we investigated 232 enforcement cases, which equated to 2.5 per 1,000 population. This compared to 2 enforcement cases investigated per 1,000 population across Wales. We took, on average, 12 days to investigate each enforcement case.¹

6.25 We investigated 76% of these enforcement cases within 84 days. The term ‘investigated’ relates to a new performance indicator definition devised by the Welsh Government, and the PI measures the time taken from receipt of a complaint of alleged breach of planning control to the time taken to investigate and notify the complainant of the outcome and/or intended action as applicable: this could be that there was no breach of planning control, that there is a breach but action is not expedient, or that there is a breach and action is proposed. Across Wales, 66% of enforcement cases were investigated within 84 days. Figure 10 shows the percentage of enforcement cases that were investigated within 84 days across all Welsh LPAs. This strong performance has continued in 2015-16, with 100% of cases investigated within 84 days in the first two quarters.

Figure 10: Percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 84 days, 2014-15



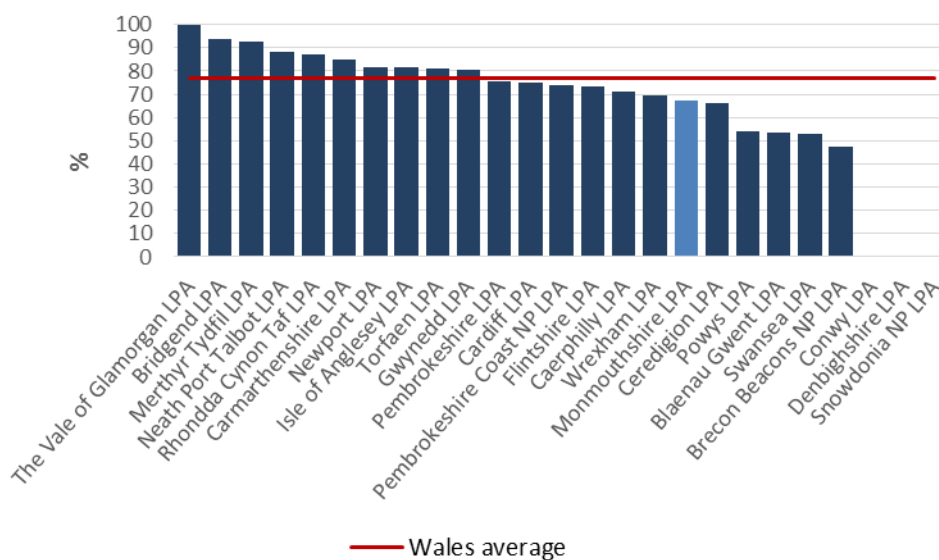
6.26 Over the same period, we resolved 110 enforcement cases, taking, on average, 121 days to resolve each case.

¹ Robust comparisons are not currently available as only 14 of the 25 LPAs supplied data for this indicator.

6.27 67% of this enforcement action was taken within 180 days from the start of the case. As Figure 11 shows this compared to 77% of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days across Wales. It should be noted that the Welsh Government has also changed this performance indicator definition, such that a case is now deemed to be resolved when one of the following has occurred: it has been established that no breach of planning control has occurred; it is not expedient to take enforcement action; planning permission has been approved either by the Council or at appeal; an Enforcement Notice has been complied with; or the breach of planning control has ceased.

6.28 This indicator is one against which further consideration needs to be given during 2015-16 to understand the reasons for current performance levels and identify ways of improving this if possible, especially given the context of diminishing resources in Councils due to funding cuts. It should be borne in mind that Monmouthshire’s performance might reflect the complexity of enforcement cases here, or our desire to pursue time-consuming action rather than simply close cases as not expedient. Performance in the first half of 2015-16 has improved, with 71% of cases resolved within 180 days. It is not yet known how this compares with the 2015-16 Wales average.

Figure 11: Percentage of enforcement cases resolved in 180 days, 2014-15



7.0 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 Based on the customer feedback in section 5 and the performance information in section 6 and appendix A, we can rightly be proud of the service we deliver. In the majority of cases we have exceeded Welsh Government targets or, where no targets have been set, we have exceeded the Wales average. We have no red indicators, and performance has improved since 2013-14 where comparable data exists.
- 7.2 Customer feedback identified the most valued characteristic of a good planning service as the availability of officers to provide advice and progress updates. This will be taken into account in future workflow planning. An opportunity exists to improve the Council's website to enable customers to better follow progress or find information themselves.
- 7.3 For the reporting period, we have only two amber indicators: the proportion of applications determined within agreed deadlines, and the number of instances where costs were awarded against the Council at appeal. In addition, there is one indicator where, although there is currently no target, performance falls below the Wales average: proportion of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days.

Speed of determining applications

- 7.4 76% of applications were determined within agreed timescales, against a Welsh Government target threshold for good performance standing at 80%. This is an area for potential improvement, however it is worth noting that only 5 out of 25 LPAs achieved the 80% target, which suggests that it is unrealistic. While it is accepted that timely decisions can have economic benefits, of greater importance to investors is clarity and certainty, and our evidence is that, within reason, customers are happy to have a slightly slower decision if it is a favourable one. We therefore place greater importance on securing a positive outcome. One area for attention is the lack of timely replies from some consultees.
- 7.5 Where decisions cannot be made within 8 weeks, case officers are encouraged to agree an extended deadline with the customer and as a result performance in the first half of 2015-16 stands at 80%. This will continue to be monitored, however no apology is made for our conscious decision to focus on securing positive outcomes: ultimately, this is what is important to our customers and stakeholders.

ACTION 1: Work with consultees to seek more timely responses.

ACTION 2: Increased use of extension of time letters where decisions cannot be made within 8 weeks.

Appeal costs

- 7.6 Costs were awarded against the Council in relation to one appeal, which has resulted in the indicator being 'amber'. This will be kept under review. An opportunity exists to present appeal decisions back to Planning Committee to facilitate discussion and shared learning.

ACTION 3: Report appeal decisions to Planning Committee to facilitate shared learning.

Speed of resolving enforcement cases

- 7.7 The Welsh Government is yet to provide a target for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's performance of resolving 67% of enforcement cases within 180 days of receipt falls below the Wales average of 77%. Part of the reason for this level of performance is clearance of a backlog by a newly appointed Conservation Monitoring Officer. This had a detrimental impact on performance against this indicator. Performance has improved in the first two quarters of 2015-16 (71% achieved) however it remains below the 2014-15 Wales average.
- 7.8 Cases where formal action is taken (for example issuing an Enforcement Notice) are inevitably lengthy matters to resolve. Monmouthshire's performance might therefore simply reflect the amount of formal action being taken: if Monmouthshire is taking more formal action, or inviting more retrospective applications to seek to regularise breaches, our performance will compare less favourably than an Authority that does not pursue formal action (which might be quicker but is not achieving a positive outcome for the complainant). Unfortunately this benchmarking data is not readily available. Further benchmarking will be undertaken in relation to this indicator to understand the context of Monmouthshire's performance and to identify and learn from best practice in another Welsh Local Planning Authority.

ACTION 4: Undertake additional benchmarking and identify and learn from best practice.

Opportunities going forward:

- 7.9 The following opportunities for the coming year have been identified as a result of this Annual Performance Report, our LDP AMR and our Service Improvement Plans:
- Restructure the service to locate the Development Control and Development Plans sections under one Head of Service and co-locate in the same offices;
 - Re-branding to emphasise the Service's focus on enabling positive outcomes rather than 'control', and to reflect the wider remit of the Development Plans team;
 - Raise the planning service's profile and importance corporately;
 - Review our pre-application advice service based on customer feedback, ensure officers are empowered to provide greater certainty/clarity in pre-app advice, and investigate options for conservation advice services;
 - To improve the web site experience for customers which would drive out waste and enable channel shift so that more customers can self-serve;
 - To make use of social media to engage a wider audience for planning matters;
 - To replace the inefficient data base for planning applications to reduce waste for staff, including the production of standard letters and monitoring reports;
 - To improve the quality of development in Conservation Areas, thereby facilitating future economic investment and fostering civic pride, through the adoption of the draft Conservation Area Appraisals;
 - Collaboration with the Village Alive Trust to engage and work with the owners of Listed Buildings on the At Risk register;
 - Adopt CIL;

- Adopt SPG to ensure the accurate implementation and interpretation of planning policy, in particular in relation to tourism development to support economic growth. Other agreed SPG for 2015-16 are affordable housing, primary shopping frontages, and ;

7.10 Progress will be measured via our 2015-16 Annual Performance Report, 2015-16 LDP Annual Monitoring Report, and our 2015-16 Service Improvement Plans.

ANNEX A - PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
Plan making			
Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	Yes		No
LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	<12	13-17	18+
Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	Yes		No
The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	>5	4-4.9	<4
Efficiency			
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	>80	60.1-79.9	<60
Average time taken to determine all applications in days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Quality			
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of appeals dismissed	>66	55.1-65.9	<55
Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	0	1	2
Engagement			
Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	Yes		No
Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to	Yes		No

WALES AVERAGE	Monmouthshire LPA LAST YEAR	Monmouthshire LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
60	N/A	N/A
Yes	N/A	N/A
4.2	4.4	5.2
24	8	50
206	No Data*	95
73	70	76
76	No Data*	62
11	0.9	3
66	66	67
0	1	1
Yes	Yes	Yes
-	Yes	Yes

MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE
provide advice to members of the public?			
Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access, track their progress (and view their content)?	Yes	Partial	No
Enforcement			
Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	Not set	Not set	Not set
Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case (in those cases where it was expedient to enforce)?	Not set	Not set	Not set
Average time taken to take enforcement action	Not set	Not set	Not set

WALES AVERAGE	Monmouthshire LPA LAST YEAR	Monmouthshire LPA THIS YEAR
Yes	Yes	Yes
Enforcement		
66	No Data*	76
71	No Data*	12
77	No Data*	67
175	No Data*	120.5

*No data is available because the Welsh Government Performance Indicator was new for 2014/15.

SECTION 1 – PLAN MAKING

Indicator	01. Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
A development plan (LDP or UDP) is in place and within the plan period	N/A	No development plan is in place (including where the plan has expired)

Authority's performance	Yes
The Council adopted its Local Development Plan in February 2014.	

Indicator	02. LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
The LDP is being progressed within 12 months of the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement	The LDP is being progressed within between 12 and 18 months of the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement	The LDP is being progressed more than 18 months later than the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement

Authority's performance	N/A
The Council has adopted its LDP and therefore this indicator is not applicable.	

Indicator	03. Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
An AMR is due, and has been prepared		An AMR is due, and has not been prepared

Authority's performance	N/A
The Council's first AMR was due to be submitted to the Welsh Government by 31 st October 2015 and has been submitted by the required deadline, however one was not required during 2014-15 (the period covered by this Annual Performance Report) and therefore this indicator is not applicable.	

Indicator	04. The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
The authority has a housing land supply of more than 5 years	The authority has a housing land supply of between 4 and 5 years	The authority has a housing land supply of less than 4 years

Authority’s performance	5.2
<p>For the APR period, the Council had a 5.2 year housing land supply. An updated Joint Housing Land Availability Study (JHLAS) was undertaken in 2015 based upon the new Technical Advice Note 1. This latest study reported in July 2015 shows that the Council’s housing land supply has reduced to 5 years’.</p> <p>This means that the Council continues to have the required housing land supply, however the rate at which the allocated housing sites are developed will be critical to ensuring the Council remains above the 5 year requirement. While the planning system allocates sites and can assist with their delivery through making prompt decisions on planning applications, other factors relating to the speed of delivery lie within the gift of the house-builders and land owners or are influenced by wider economic considerations such as mortgage lending, interest rates and job certainty.</p>	

SECTION 2 - EFFICIENCY

Indicator	05. Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	50
<p>No target has been set by the Welsh Government for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's performance of 50% is in the context of a Wales average of 24%. Monmouthshire's performance against this indicator continues to be strong, with 63% of major applications determined within agreed timescales in the first half of 2015-16.</p> <p>It should be noted that the Welsh Government has amended this indicator over the last two years. It now excludes the time period for S106 agreements to be signed (the 'clock stops' when a resolution to grant subject to a S106 agreement is made). In addition, extended periods to determine applications can be agreed with customers, and provided this agreed deadline is achieved the decision counts as 'in time'. These changes reflect the Council's customer and outcome focus, and aligns with our evidenced approach that customers prefer a positive outcome to a quick decision. It should be noted that these changes to the performance indicator apply to all LPAs, so the benchmarking remains consistent, and it is clear that Monmouthshire performs well against this indicator.</p>	

Indicator	06. Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	95
<p>As above, the Welsh Government has not yet set a performance target for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's average time of 95 days compares very favourably with the Wales average of 209 days.</p>	

Indicator	07. Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Between 60% and 80% of applications are determined within the statutory time period	Less than 60% of applications are determined within the statutory time period

Authority's performance	76
<p>76% of all planning applications were determined within the required timescales. This compared to 73% across Wales, but was below the 80% target. It is worth noting that only 5 out of 25 LPAs met the 80% target, which suggests that the Welsh Government's target is unrealistic.</p> <p>Following engagement with customers and stakeholders, Monmouthshire County Council has made the evidence-based decision that the outcome of planning applications is far more important than the speed of decision-making. Within reason, customers would prefer to continue working with us to secure an acceptable scheme and obtain planning permission, with as few pre-commencement conditions as possible, than simply have a decision made within an arbitrary 8 week deadline. The impact of planning decisions is long-lived and, while it is recognised that timely decisions can assist the economy, developers and investors also seek clarity and certainty and ultimately want planning permission.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the above statement, our performance for the first two quarters of 2015-16 stands at 80% which in part reflects a change to the Welsh Government PI definition and allows LPAs to agree extended deadlines with customers. However, this approach fits the Council's customer focus, and further evidences that customers are happy with a longer decision time if it secures a positive outcome.</p>	

Indicator	08. Average time taken to determine all applications in days	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	62
<p>The Welsh Government has not yet set a performance target for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's average time of 62 days compares favourably with the Wales average of 76 days.</p> <p>It is understood that the Welsh average is skewed by erroneous data returns by Ceredigion, however the impact of the corrected data on the Wales average is not yet known. However, based on the graph at Figure 2, Monmouthshire's performance is good.</p>	

SECTION 3 - QUALITY

Indicator	09. Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority's performance	3
<p>The Welsh Government has not yet set a performance target for this indicator. Monmouthshire's performance is 3%, but this actually equates to just one application where Members went against officer advice. This is unusually low and it is likely that the percentage will increase in future years. However, provided that Committee decisions are based on good planning judgement and material planning considerations, this is a perfectly acceptable part of the planning process.</p> <p>The one application in question for 2014-15 was for a solar farm at Rhewl Farm. This decision was subsequently overturned at appeal.</p>	

Indicator	10. Percentage of appeals dismissed	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
More than 66% (two thirds) of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	Between 55% and 66% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal	Less than 55% of planning decisions are successfully defended at appeal

Authority's performance	67
<p>Monmouthshire's performance at 67% of decisions upheld at appeal is just above the Welsh average and above the Welsh Government's target for good performance. Monmouthshire's performance has typically been between 65% and 70% over recent years, but dipped to 49% in 2012-13. Since that time the trend has been for improved performance but this will continue to be monitored.</p>	

Indicator	11. Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
The authority has not had costs awarded against it at appeal	The authority has had costs awarded against it in one appeal case	The authority has had costs awarded against it in two or more appeal cases

Authority’s performance	1
<p>Monmouthshire County Council had costs awarded against it in relation to one appeal during the APR period. This related to a solar farm at Llanvaply, which was refused by Planning Committee against officer advice. Unfortunately, an additional objection relating to agricultural land quality was added to the Council’s reasons for refusal during the appeal proceedings. Although this additional matter was raised in direct response to evidence submitted by the appellants, its introduction was held by the Inspector to be unreasonable behaviour and costs were awarded against the Council.</p>	

SECTION 4 – ENGAGEMENT

Indicator	12. Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	
“Good”		“Improvement needed”
Members of the public are able to address the Planning Committee		Members of the public are not able to address the Planning Committee

Authority’s performance	Yes
<p>The Council has a well-established public speaking protocol and allows both objectors and the Community Council to speak, subject to certain conditions, and the applicant has a right of reply. It is expected that this will exceed the standardised all-Wales minimum service being proposed by the Welsh Government, however this will be reviewed in due course.</p>	

Indicator	13. Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	
“Good”		“Improvement needed”
Members of the public can seek advice from a duty planning officer		There is no duty planning officer available

Authority’s performance	-
<p>The Council offers a duty officer service five days a week. Although staff resources are under considerable pressure, customer feedback identified the ability to contact officers for advice as their priority. Consequently, it is hoped to retain the current level of service. However, other changes introduced by the Welsh Government, such as fee refunds, might necessitate resources being focused on determining applications at the expense of this level of service.</p>	

Indicator	14. Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access track their progress (and view their content)?	
"Good"	"Fair"	"Improvement needed"
All documents are available online	Only the planning application details are available online, and access to other documents must be sought directly	No planning application information is published online

Authority's performance	Yes
<p>The Council has implemented electronic document management and publishes all public application documents to the website. Customer feedback confirms that this service is valued. Measures are being investigated in 2015-16 to ensure documents are uploaded to the website in a timely fashion (in response to customer feedback) and to improve the functionality of the website search functions, to enable more customers to self-serve.</p>	

SECTION 5 – ENFORCEMENT

Indicator	15. Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority’s performance	76
<p>The Welsh Government has not yet set a target for this indicator, however it can be seen that Monmouthshire’s performance of investigating 76% of enforcement complaints within 84 days of receipt is well above the Wales average of 66%. This indicates that Monmouthshire is providing a very good level of service. Performance against this indicator has further improved in the first two quarters of 2015-16.</p>	

Indicator	16. Average time taken to investigate enforcement cases	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority’s performance	12
<p>The Welsh Government has not yet set a target for this indicator, however Monmouthshire’s achievement of investigating complaints within 12 days of receipt is well below the Wales average of 71 days, indicating that Monmouthshire is providing a very good level of service.</p>	

Indicator	17. Percentage of enforcement cases where enforcement action is taken or a retrospective application received within 180 days from the start of the case (in those cases where it was expedient to enforce)	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority’s performance	67
<p>The Welsh Government is yet to provide a target for this indicator, however Monmouthshire’s performance of resolving 67% of enforcement cases within 180 days of receipt falls below the Wales average of 77%. Part of the reason for this level of performance is clearance of a backlog by a newly appointed Conservation Monitoring Officer. This had a detrimental impact on performance against this indicator. Performance has improved in the first two quarters of 2015-16 (71% achieved) however this too remains below the 2014-15 Wales average.</p> <p>The PI definition and time period were changed significantly mid-way during the reporting period, however the data for all LPAs comprises this combination of two different PI definitions and so while the data is not perfect, the benchmarking comparison is consistent across Wales. The PI now records when a breach is fully dealt with, so for example an application for retrospective permission is approved or an Enforcement Notice is complied with. (The indicator previously measured when a retrospective application was submitted or a Notice was issued within 84 days).</p> <p>Cases where formal action is taken (for example issuing an Enforcement Notice) are inevitably lengthy matters to resolve. Monmouthshire’s performance might therefore simply reflect the amount of formal action being taken: if Monmouthshire is taking more formal action, or inviting more retrospective applications to seek to regularise breaches, our performance will compare less favourably than an Authority that does not pursue formal action (which might be quicker but is not achieving a positive outcome for the complainant). Unfortunately this benchmarking data is not readily available.</p>	

Indicator	18. Average time taken to take enforcement action	
“Good”	“Fair”	“Improvement needed”
Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked	Target to be benchmarked

Authority’s performance	120.5
<p>The Welsh Government has not yet set a target for this indicator, however Monmouthshire’s achievement of resolving complaints within an average of 120 days of receipt is well below the Wales average of 175 days, indicating that Monmouthshire is providing a very good level of service.</p>	

SECTION 6 – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

The purpose of the Sustainable Development Indicators is to measure the contribution the planning system makes to sustainable development in Wales.

The Sustainable Development Indicators will be used to measure the progress against national planning sustainability objectives, set out in Planning Policy Wales, and can be used to demonstrate to our stakeholders the role and scope of the planning system in delivering wider objectives. The information will also be useful to local planning authorities to understand more about the outcomes of the planning system and help inform future decisions.

<p>Authority's returns</p>	<p>In quarter 1 we provided a full response (54 of 54 data items); In quarter 2 we provided a full response (54 of 54 data items); In quarter 3 we provided a full response (54 of 54 data items); In quarter 4 we provided a full response (54 of 54 data items).</p>
<p>Monmouthshire Council provided full stats returns for these indicators. However, it should be noted that this work had to be undertaken manually because our back office IT system cannot store or retrieve most of the data. This is a common problem throughout Wales, the resolution of which has proven to be very time consuming. The Council has procured a new IT system that will be live during 2015-16 so it is hoped that the time and resource spent manually collecting this data will be reduced.</p> <p>It is worth noting that, in many cases, the sustainable development (SD) indicator definition is different to information collected in the LDP Annual Monitoring Report, and therefore the results are different in some cases. For example, in terms of housing approvals, the SD indicator records only detailed or final Reserved Matters approvals, whereas the LDP AMR quite rightly (for that context) also includes outline applications as evidence that allocated sites are coming forward. This can have significant differences in the results, for example 370 dwellings at Wonastow Road excluded from the SD indicators below but included in the AMR.</p> <p>These discrepancies have been checked and properly accounted for. Going forward, where appropriate, consideration will be given to amending the LDP AMR monitoring indicators slightly to reflect the SD indicators, so that similar data is only captured once, reducing duplicated effort and potential confusion. In other cases, such as reviewing progress on the delivery of LDP housing sites, the AMR monitoring indicator will remain unchanged.</p>	

Indicator	SD1. The floorspace (square metres) granted and refused planning permission for new economic development on allocated employment sites during the year.
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Granted (square metres)	
Authority's data	3,925

Refused (square metres)	
Authority's data	0

The planning system should support economic development and steer such development to the most appropriate locations. This indicator provides information on the contribution the planning system is making to delivering traditional economic development in identified employment sites.

This performance indicator measures new buildings in square metres approved on allocated and protected employment sites. It excludes change of use consents where vacant buildings have been brought back into employment-generating use. It is also limited to measuring only 'B' use classes, and so excludes supporting employment uses such as hotels. Consequently, this data shows a small proportion of the decisions made to support economic growth in the County. More information can be found in the AMR.

During the monitoring period, 3925 sq m of new economic development (as defined by this indicator) was approved on employment sites. No applications for economic development on allocated or protected employment sites were refused.

While plenty of land is allocated within the LDP, the take-up rate of employment land was limited. This suggests that the planning service is playing its role effectively in enabling proposals to proceed, but wider market forces are affecting the extent to which developers are coming forward to invest at present.

The take-up included two new build developments: one at Wonastow Road, Monmouth, and one at Pill Way, Portskewett.

The amount of approved development captured by this indicator is likely to increase in the next monitoring period. Applications have been submitted for significant employment development on the Wonastow Road allocated employment land (part of a 6.5Ha employment site that received outline planning permission during the monitoring period) and for expansion at the InBev brewery in Magor. It is therefore expected that the return for 2015-16 will be significantly higher.

Indicator	SD2. Planning permission granted for renewable and low carbon energy development during the year.
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Granted permission (number of applications)	
Authority's data	2

Granted permission (MW energy generation)	
Authority's data	8.3MW

The planning system can optimise renewable and low carbon energy generation. This indicator tells us part of the contribution the planning system is making to delivering renewable and low carbon energy generation and moving towards a low carbon economy.

Small scale renewables are now mostly permitted development and, because they do not need planning permission, will never appear in these stats returns. The indicator records only stand-alone schemes for the purpose of generating energy from renewables: it does not record, for example, solar panels on the roof of a new barn or on new dwellings.

Two applications were permitted over the monitoring period for on-site renewable energy generation. One scheme related to a biomass boiler and associated biomass storage barn in order to provide 7 households in the vicinity with heat and hot water. This generates 0.2MW.

The other related to a solar farm at Buckwell Farm, Pen y Cae Mawr, with a maximum output of 8.1 MW providing energy for the equivalent of 2120 average households annually. The solar scheme will also provide educational facilities as part of a wider community education scheme. Both schemes will provide economic, social and community benefits once implemented. The two schemes approved over the monitoring period suggest that Strategic Policy S12 and supporting policies are operating effectively in respect of renewable energy.

The 2015-16 reporting period is likely to show a higher number of megawatts approved, although changes to the feed-in tariff will mean the amount is likely to drop significantly in 2016-17. This illustrates that factors outside of the planning system have the greatest influence on the delivery of renewable energy.

Indicator	SD3. The number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year.
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Market housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	215

Affordable housing (number of units)	
Authority's data	52

The planning system can facilitate the provision of market and affordable housing to meet local housing requirements. This indicator provides information on the contribution of the planning system to delivering new housing.

It is worth noting that this data differs significantly from the LDP AMR data due to differences between the indicator definitions. In particular, this sustainable development indicator records only full planning permission and Reserved Matters approvals: outline consents are excluded.

During the monitoring period, detailed planning permission was granted for 215 market dwellings and 52 affordable units. This equates to 19% of all residential units being affordable. This reflects a combination of development viability pressures and the size of the schemes in question (affordable housing is not currently sought on small developments).

A detailed commentary on housing approvals is provided in the LDP AMR. This topic will continue to be closely monitored, however known approved schemes in the first two quarters of 2015-16 together with known progress on other residential allocations mean performance will be significantly better in the next APR reporting period.

Indicator	SD4. Planning permission granted and refused for development in C1 and C2 floodplain areas during the year.
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Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that DID NOT meet all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission	
Authority's data	0 (and 0.2Ha)

Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that did not meet all TAN 15 tests which were REFUSED permission on flood risk grounds	
Authority's data	0 (and 0Ha)

Number of residential units (and also hectares of non-residential units) that MET all TAN 15 tests which were GRANTED permission	
Authority's data	0 (and 1.8Ha)

The planning system has an important role in ensuring that new development is not exposed unnecessarily to flooding and can guide development to locations at little or no risk from flooding. This indicator provides information on how planning applications for development in floodplain areas are being managed.

During this reporting period, no dwellings at all were approved within flood zones C1 or C2. This is largely because very few of the allocated LDP sites fall within allocated flood zones.

One application was granted permission for a change of use to holiday accommodation in Zone C1 floodplain over the monitoring period. The application related to the conversion of a granary to the rear of a public house, with a site area of 170 sq metres (0.2Ha). While it was accepted that the tourism use would result in the building being used for highly vulnerable development the proposal was deemed to be in accordance with Policy SD3 (Flood Risk). The conversion of the granary was considered as an extension to the existing use of the public house providing a supplementary source of income for the established tourism/leisure business. In addition to this, there was an extant permission for new build holiday lets on site and the principle for holiday accommodation was previously accepted in this location.

No development was refused on TAN15 flood risk grounds during the year.

1.8 hectares of land was approved for a storage and distribution use within flood zone C1. This was on a brownfield site, and was policy compliant.

Indicator	SD5. The area of land (ha) granted planning permission for new development on previously developed land and greenfield land during the year.
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Previously developed land (hectares)	
Authority's data	9Ha

Greenfield land (hectares)	
Authority's data	22Ha

The planning system can ensure that, wherever possible, previously developed land is used in preference to greenfield sites, particularly those of high agricultural or ecological value. This indicator tells us where the planning system is directing new development.

The performance against this indicator simply reflects the nature of Monmouthshire as a County. The County is predominantly rural and has very little brownfield land. Consequently, the majority of development is on greenfield land. Directing 29% of development to brownfield land is a significant achievement in our local context.

It is worth noting that the data provided above differs significantly from that recorded in our LDP AMR, because the definition for the SD indicator reported upon here excludes outline planning permissions, and therefore significant sites site as Wonastow Road, which secured outline planning permission during the reporting period, are not recorded here. Such schemes will be reported in future APRs when detailed planning permission or Reserved Matters consent is given.

Indicator	SD6. The area of public open space (ha) that would be lost and gained as a result of development granted planning permission during the quarter.
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Open space lost (hectares)	
Authority's data	1.1Ha

Open space gained (hectares)	
Authority's data	4Ha

Open spaces can provide recreational, amenity and environmental value as well as having a role in climate protection and adaptation to the impacts of climate change. This indicator measures how the planning system is protecting existing, and facilitating the provision of new, open spaces.

During the monitoring period 3 permissions were granted on areas of open space not allocated for development in the LDP, totalling 1.47 hectares. Two of these permissions related to residential development, one of which involved the loss of an area of grassland within Llangybi (0.19 hectares). Although an open green space, the area is not afforded specific designation within the LDP as an area of amenity importance under Policy DES2, and given compliance with other LDP policies the principle of development was considered acceptable. The other residential permission involved the loss of a small area of amenity importance in Rogiet (0.85 hectares). However, the development was not considered to be contrary to the criteria of Policy DES2 and as the vast majority of public open space is to be retained for recreational use it was considered an acceptable loss of open space. Moreover, the development will enable a 100% affordable housing site to be delivered.

The other permission resulted in the loss of non-allocated open space related to community uses – an overspill car park at Llantillio Pertholey Community Hall (0.09 hectares). As this permission provides a community use the loss of open space was considered acceptable in principle in planning policy terms.

As a result of planning permissions, 4Ha of new open space have been created.

Indicator	SD7. The total financial contributions (£) agreed from new development granted planning permission during the quarter for the provision of community infrastructure.
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Gained via Section 106 agreements (£)	
Authority's data	£1,823,879.20

Gained via Community Infrastructure Levy (£)	
Authority's data	0

Financial contributions can be used to fund the provision of community infrastructure required to support sustainable development. This indicator measures the level of financial contributions agreed for the provision of community infrastructure.

£1.8m worth of Section 106 contributions were secured during the reporting period, with £1.9m worth of S106 monies actually received by the Council during the same period. The latter relates to contributions actually paid as past planning permissions are implemented and the trigger points for payments reached. A significant proportion of this money was from the Caldicot ASDA development.

The Council is working towards adopting a CIL.

SUBJECT: Scrutiny of Planning Service Performance
MEETING: Economy & Development Select Committee
DATE: Monday 16th November 2015
DIVISIONS/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Members with a report on the performance of the Planning service for the period 2014-15.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting on 15 October 2015, the Economy and Development Select Committee requested an opportunity to scrutinise the performance of the Planning service. The Head of Planning has just completed the Council's first Annual Performance Report (APR) for the 2014-15 financial year, which provides an opportune time and evidence base for this review.
- 2.2 For the first time, the Welsh Government requires all Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in Wales to submit an Annual Performance Report for the planning service. This report must be submitted by 20th November 2015. This requirement links with the new Planning (Wales) Act 2015, and the Welsh Government's objective of creating a positive and enabling planning service. The Act includes new powers for the Welsh Government to intervene, including removing planning powers from a Local Planning Authority, requiring the preparation of joint Local Development Plans (LDPs), or requiring the merger of LPAs.
- 2.3 The APR is divided into sections, with the format and appearance being consistent throughout Wales, and all LPAs reporting on the same performance indicators. The report looks at where the planning service sits corporately, how it is structured and how its work fits with corporate priorities; local pressures; customer feedback; performance against national indicators with comparisons against the Welsh average and/or Welsh Government targets; and achievement in delivering against sustainable development indicators. The report concludes by looking at key opportunities going forward and areas for further attention/action.
- 2.4 The Annual Performance Report is provided at Appendix 1.

3 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The Planning service's work links directly with Monmouthshire County Council's objective of delivering sustainable, resilient communities. The service is directly involved with wider corporate projects such as 21st Century Schools, rationalising our estates portfolio.
- 3.2 Key areas of work for the Service include:
- Providing pre-application advice to customers;
 - Determining planning applications in accordance with adopted policy and material planning considerations, taking into account stakeholder comments and corporate objectives;
 - Securing financial contributions from developers to offset the infrastructure demands of new development and meet the need for affordable housing;

- Safeguarding the County's 2400 Listed Buildings and 31 Conservation Areas, areas of archaeological sensitivity, the Wye Valley AONB, the Brecon Beacons National Park and the European designated Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation;
- Taking robust enforcement action against unauthorised development that is unacceptable;
- Raising awareness of the statutory role and importance of the land use planning framework, building on the high levels of engagement underpinning the LDP process;
- Preparing supplementary planning guidance (SPG) to help to foster the implementation and interpretation of LDP policy;
- Implementing the Council's LDP through engaging and working with communities, and partnership working with internal and external partners to foster the co-creation and growth of enterprise, community and environmental well-being. This will include involvement with the Whole Place work;
- Monitoring and evaluating Plan policies and the process of Plan preparation.

Customer service feedback

- 3.3 Between 2010 and 2012 the Council's planning service underwent a Systems Thinking review. This review sought to strip the function back to first principles: what is important to our customers, and how can waste (actions or procedures that do not add value to the outcome) be eliminated? This evidence-based review has been fully implemented, although part of the Systems Thinking approach requires services to be kept under review and closely monitored.
- 3.4 This review identified that the following things are important to customers:
- Customers value pre-application advice and advice during the consideration of the application;
 - They want officers to be accessible and there to be open and honest communication;
 - They want consistency of pre- application advice and in validation of applications
 - They want Planning Committee to follow the officer's recommendation and value being able to have a dialogue with Members prior to determination
 - They don't want too many conditions being attached to decisions, and when conditions are imposed they should be relevant and easy to discharge
 - They value being able to submit an application online and to search for applications and information online.
 - Third parties value being listened to during the application process.
- 3.5 The service therefore operates with these priorities shaping behaviour and procedures. The service is committed to having an outcome focus rather than chasing arbitrary performance targets that are not a priority to our customers.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Based on the customer feedback in section 5 and the performance information in section 6 and appendix A, we can rightly be proud of the service we deliver. In the majority of cases we have exceeded Welsh Government targets or, where no targets have been set, we have exceeded the Wales average. We have no red indicators, and performance has improved since 2013-14 where comparable data exists.
- 4.2 Customer feedback identified the most valued characteristic of a good planning service as the availability of officers to provide advice and progress updates. This

will be taken into account in future workflow planning. An opportunity exists to improve the Council's website to enable customers to better follow progress or find information themselves, and to use social media to increase awareness of opportunities for engagement.

- 4.3 For the reporting period, we have only two amber indicators: the proportion of applications determined within agreed deadlines, and the number of instances where costs were awarded against the Council at appeal. In addition, there is one indicator where, although there is currently no target, performance falls below the Wales average: proportion of enforcement cases resolved within 180 days.

Speed of determining applications

- 4.4 76% of applications were determined within agreed timescales, against a Welsh Government target threshold for good performance standing at 80%. This is an area for potential improvement, however it is worth noting that only 5 out of 25 LPAs achieved the 80% target, which suggests that it is unrealistic. While it is accepted that timely decisions can have economic benefits, of greater importance to investors is clarity and certainty, and our evidence is that, within reason, customers are happy to have a slightly slower decision if it is a favourable one. We therefore place greater importance on securing a positive outcome. One area for attention is the lack of timely replies from some consultees.
- 4.5 Where decisions cannot be made within 8 weeks, case officers are encouraged to agree an extended deadline with the customer and as a result performance in the first half of 2015-16 stands at 80%. This will continue to be monitored, however no apology is made for our conscious decision to focus on securing positive outcomes: ultimately, this is what is important to our customers and stakeholders.

ACTION 1: Work with consultees to seek more timely responses.

ACTION 2: Increased use of extension of time letters where decisions cannot be made within 8 weeks.

Appeal costs

- 4.6 Costs were awarded against the Council in relation to one appeal, which has resulted in the indicator being 'amber'. This will be kept under review. An opportunity exists to present appeal decisions back to Planning Committee to facilitate discussion and shared learning.

ACTION 3: Report appeal decisions to Planning Committee to facilitate shared learning.

Speed of resolving enforcement cases

- 4.7 The Welsh Government is yet to provide a target for this indicator, however Monmouthshire's performance of resolving 67% of enforcement cases within 180 days of receipt falls below the Wales average of 77%. Part of the reason for this level of performance is clearance of a backlog by a newly appointed Conservation Monitoring Officer. This had a detrimental impact on performance against this indicator. Performance has improved in the first two quarters of 2015-16 (71% achieved) however it remains below the 2014-15 Wales average.
- 4.8 Cases where formal action is taken (for example issuing an Enforcement Notice) are inevitably lengthy matters to resolve. Monmouthshire's performance might therefore simply reflect the amount of formal action being taken: if Monmouthshire is taking more formal action, or inviting more retrospective applications to seek to regularise

breaches, our performance will compare less favourably than an Authority that does not pursue formal action (which might be quicker but is not achieving a positive outcome for the complainant). Unfortunately this benchmarking data is not readily available. Further benchmarking will be undertaken in relation to this indicator to understand the context of Monmouthshire's performance and to identify and learn from best practice in another Welsh Local Planning Authority.

ACTION 4: Undertake additional benchmarking and identify and learn from best practice.

Opportunities going forward:

4.9 The following opportunities for the coming year have been identified as a result of this Annual Performance Report, our LDP AMR and our Service Improvement Plans. A number of these actions have already been completed:

- Restructure the service to locate the Development Control and Development Plans sections under one Head of Service and co-locate in the same offices;
- Re-branding to emphasise the Service's focus on enabling positive outcomes rather than 'control', and to reflect the wider remit of the Development Plans team;
- Raise the planning service's profile and importance corporately;
- Review our pre-application advice service based on customer feedback, ensure officers are empowered to provide greater certainty/clarity in pre-app advice, and investigate options for conservation advice services;
- To improve the web site experience for customers which would drive out waste and enable channel shift so that more customers can self-serve;
- To make use of social media to engage a wider audience for planning matters;
- To replace the inefficient data base for planning applications to reduce waste for staff, including the production of standard letters and monitoring reports;
- To improve the quality of development in Conservation Areas, thereby facilitating future economic investment and fostering civic pride, through the adoption of the draft Conservation Area Appraisals;
- Collaboration with the Village Alive Trust to engage and work with the owners of Listed Buildings on the At Risk register;
- Adopt CIL;
- Adopt SPG to ensure the accurate implementation and interpretation of planning policy, in particular in relation to tourism development to support economic growth. Other agreed SPG for 2015-16 are affordable housing, primary shopping frontages, and ;

4.10 Progress will be measured via our 2015-16 Annual Performance Report, 2015-16 LDP Annual Monitoring Report, and our 2015-16 Service Improvement Plans.

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